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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting full employment and decent work for all

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The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 2006.

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Statement

I. Introduction

1. On the occasion of this forty-fifth session of the Commission for Social Development on the Theme of the "Promotion of Full Employment and Decent Work for All", the NGOs endorsing this statement draw attention to the issue of ending the discrimination and exploitation of migrant women and girls.

II. Recommendations

2. We urge all Member States to:

- **Immediately ratify and implement the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.**
- **Recognize the link between migration, trade, aid, development and gender rights and support the 8 Millennium Development Goals.**
- **Create a UN Forum on Migration Issues within the United Nations. Such a Forum would facilitate dialogue to review policies and make recommendations for developing further policies. The inclusion and participation of migrants, NGOs, and the private sector in this dialogue, along with member states will ensure true United Nations partnerships and the most effective way for policy creation.**
- **Create or transform their social, economic and political structures to promote conditions leading to the human development of all people.**
- **Formulate, implement and develop migration policy consistent with the international human rights standards. Counter intolerance, racism and discrimination ensuring that migrants have equal access to employment, education, healthcare, legal protection and that their human rights are respected and protected.**
- **Combat corruption and organized crime. This will be a significant factor in halting the scourge of trafficking and the smuggling of persons.**
- **Develop and implement resources for human rights education especially for government officials and all who are charged with security and immigration enforcement.**

3. We in the NGO community commit to support any of the above actions to stop the discrimination and exploitation of migrant women and girls.

The Female Face of Migration

4. There are now about 192 million people living outside their place of birth, which is about three per cent of the world's population. This means that roughly one of every thirty-five persons in the world is a migrant.[1] In some countries, the percentage of women migrants is as high as 80 percent.

[1] International Organization for Migration: http://www.iom.int/jahia/page3.html

Migration also has a young face with about 1/3 of migrants from developing countries aged between 12 and 24 years old.

5. Women and children, in particular girl children, are among the most vulnerable of all migrants. Female migrants are vulnerable to conflict gender based violence, discrimination, and cultural restrictions. On the other hand, the migration of women has the potential to provide great benefit to families and society in both sending and receiving countries. Good immigration policy should empower women in ways that promote these benefits.

6. Data on female migration especially indigenous women is generally inadequate and we urge further research in the area. We do know that the experience of women and girls in migration differs both positively and negatively from that of men.

7. Many women migrate to escape poverty and lack of decent work in their home countries. Although globalization does have positive benefits, there are significant negative impacts; for example, unskilled and poorly educated women and girls experience its effects as an increase in poverty and marginalization. They move to survive. More skilled workers know that they can find better pay, better working conditions and greater security in richer countries. Detrimental impacts of recent free trade agreements include increased poverty among those who can least afford it individually, nationally, regionally, as confirmed in United Nations reports prepared at the end of the United Nation's first decade to eradicate poverty.

8. Others are forced to leave the land of their birth because of health emergencies and natural disasters. Some migrate to richer countries in the hope of finding treatment for disease and malnutrition. Others depart their homelands because natural disasters like tsunamis, hurricanes or earthquakes leave them homeless and vulnerable. Other times –all too often - war, political persecution and discrimination caused by political, cultural and religious differences force their movement from their birthplaces. Finally, in some cases, particularly for women, suffering torture or sexual violence at the hands of those who should most protect them leaves them little choice but to flee their country of origin or transit.

9. An effective immigration policy must be one that is a human rights-based approach, is intimately linked with trade and foreign policy and which allows for the development of countries of origin as well as benefiting the country of destination.

10. On the positive side, migration can facilitate women's escape from conflict, personal violence, discrimination, cultural restrictions or oppressive gender roles to assert greater autonomy over their lives. Migration may offer new job opportunities, economic opportunities and decision-making power, as well as better education and access to health care for both themselves and their children. Through remittances income can be provided for impoverished families in a women's country of origin. Further, by filling the gaps in labor forces it can benefit countries of destination. These working women benefit the governments in the countries of destination by paying taxes, contributing to social security funds and serving as leaders in their families and communities.

11. Women and girls, do however, face greater personal risks and may experience coercion, violence, theft and fraud in the migration process. For example, it is estimated that the number of trafficked people across the world number more than 3 million, with 80 per cent of them being women and girls. The trafficking of women, young girls and boys is now the third largest source of profits for organized crime after drugs and guns.[2] Further, the loss of the services of well-qualified women migrants hurts the home country particularly in the health and education sector. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the loss of skilled health care workers and teachers leaves the home country without needed experienced persons to cope with the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the education of the next generation. And girls separated from their families suffer irreparable consequences.

12. In recent years, the difficulty of attracting and retaining healthcare workers particularly in long-term care settings has dramatically increased. Long-term care settings and healthcare employers in developed countries have attracted a growing number of international workers from developing countries to address these critical shortages. The most intimate care to frail older persons in developed countries is increasingly provided by young migrating women. Integrating migrating nurses and aides into the host countries can be a major challenge and discrimination is reported frequently. Young women answer an ad to be an "au pair" and discover a different reality. Further analysis of the potential causes and existing patterns of international migration of workers to work in developed countries is needed. Key policy issues and the positive and negative impacts of migration in both developed and the developing countries need to be addressed.

13. We want to draw attention to the special vulnerability of women and girl migrants and their protection needs at all stages of the migration process and reiterate the need for a human rights based approach to migration.

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2 "Women And International Migration a Long Neglected Issue", Ghanaian Chronicle, September 19, 2006, Copyright 2006 All Africa, Inc. Africa News